



PRESS RELEASE

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Vilsack signs Great Places agreements

(DES MOINES) – Governor Tom Vilsack today signed agreements with Iowa’s three pilot Great Places, creating work plans designed to make each – Clinton, Coon Rapids and Sioux City – a great place to live, work and raise a family.

The Great Places concept emerged through the state’s purchasing results budget process in the area of transforming Iowa’s economy. It is designed to bring together the resources of state government to build capacity in communities, regions, neighborhoods or districts to cultivate the unique and authentic qualities that make the places special. The Great Places initiative will also bolster the state’s other successful economic tools like Vision Iowa and the Iowa Values Fund.

“When I issued Executive Order 39 creating Great Places, I called for innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship at the local level and across state government,” Vilsack said. “I wanted the state to be a true partner with the great places, stimulating ideas and planning, streamlining access to state resources, helping leverage local and private resources and sharing technical expertise. Clearly, state government and Iowa’s communities have answered that call.”

Today’s action authorizes the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) to oversee the objectives outlined in each community’s work plans.

“This program redefines the way government does business with the people of Iowa,” DCA Director Anita Walker said. “Rather than asking communities and local leaders to make their plans fit state programs, we have identified the programs and resources that can be used to make their dreams and visions come true. Rather than building a community’s dream piece by piece, we are synchronizing and streamlining programs, working in collaboration with local leaders, and combining resources for high impact and results.”

The Clinton plan calls for creating a distinctive boardwalk with restaurants, entertainment and carnival rides; extending North River Drive to Main Avenue and establishing nearby public places; renovating its unique “1,000” steps site; and more, including expanded walking and hiking trails in Eagle Point Park.

The Coon Rapids plan calls for enhancing the existing beauty and utility of Whiterock Conservancy, through reworking trails, creating interpretative signage, developing campgrounds, reviewing road safety and building a new paved parking lot. The plan also calls for creating a recreational loop around Coon Rapids to provide access to Whiterock for pedestrians, bicyclists, equestrians and visitors with limited mobility. The plan includes the development of fishing ponds, an Osprey Project, bike and pedestrian-friendly streetscaping, and more, including the cultivation of “Dark Skies Protection” and

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purchase of a telescope.

The Sioux City plan focuses on creating recreational trails and wayfinding signage in the downtown area; transforming the existing Yards area into a more aesthetically pleasing and functional area for recreation and historical preservation; studying the feasibility of a joint Museum/Regents center in the area, and more, including the creation of a Sioux City School of Architecture that capitalizes on the community's unique terra cotta "brand."

The three pilot communities were identified in October by the Great Places Citizen Advisory Board. Guttenberg and Central City were designated as alternates. In making its decision on the three pilot places, the board examined the dimensions each community was asked to address: a unique sense of place; engaging experiences, a rich, diverse social fabric; a vital, creative economy; a pleasing environment; a strong foundation; and a creative culture. The board also looked at each community's level of readiness to move forward with implementing its vision.

More than 1,000 Iowans attended Great Places forums all across the state last May and June. By the July 1, 2005 deadline, 146 places from 94 counties submitted invitations to the state to partner with them to become Great Places. More than 75 trained coaches from about 20 state agencies were deployed in teams throughout Iowa this past summer to work with places on their visions and offer presentations. Seventy-four places submitted offers to the Citizen Advisory Board.

In his Condition of the State address earlier this month, Vilsack proposed \$1.5 million for the program in FY07, including \$1 million for infrastructure projects. Additional information about Iowa Great Places is available at www.iowagreatplaces.gov.